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JOHN KEATS MEMORIAL LECTURE*

The Keatsian Paradox: The Hectic and the Healthy

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I am profoundly honoured to be invited to lecture on such a subject to such a distinguished audience in such famous and ancient surroundings. My lecture falls into three parts; the first and third are biographical, and the second a critique drawn exclusively from Keats's letters and so biographical in effect.

Part I

Keats's life was harsh and sad, his thought rich and complex. The grimness of life, experienced from the first in the tragic deaths of his father and his mother, and the shattering of the family, was brought home to him again in the winter of 1818 by the state of his beloved brother Tom's health, which now gave unmistakable signs of consumption. In January, Tom was spitting blood, and another agonizing period in Keats's life, of anxiety and fear, was starting. It is probably hard for anyone brought up in the last twenty years to feel in the way Keats must have felt, the thrill of horror and doom which the diagnosis of consumption could provoke. It carried with it suggestions of fate, misery and terror. Keats was now, during January and February 1818, seeing his *Endymion* through the press. Earlier in December Haydon had taken Keats's life-mask and painted his head along with Hazlitt's, Wordsworth's and Voltaire's into his enormous canvas *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*. Tom, who was too ill to stay in London, was taken by George, unemployed at this time, to the milder climate of Teignmouth. Keats was also living, in his characteristically energetic, pleasure-loving and courageous way, a vigorous social life. He saw Wordsworth more then once, attended dances, dined out frequently—one such dinner was at Haydon's, where the guests included Wordsworth and Lamb, and occasionally attended wild parties, often on a Saturday night. He saw his sister several times when she was in London with the Abbeys. He was attending Hazlitt's lectures. Altogether, it is easy to see why he wrote, 'I have been racketing too much and do not feel well'.

The six months from January to June 1818 were a most significant period in Keats's intellectual formation. His conscious aim, he said, was 'to follow Solomon's directions of "get Wisdom—get understanding"'. The complex mind he aimed at, the mind both imaginative and careful, existing both on sensation and thought, was being developed not in retirement but amid a social whirl, the professional business in preparing the *Endymion* manuscript, amending and correcting proofs, in study and continued attendance at Hazlitt's lectures, and disturbed by painful anxieties caused by Tom Keats's declining health. George, who was looking after Tom at Teignmouth, planned to convert the money left him by their grandmother, Mrs Jennings, to marry and emigrate to the United States. (Neither George nor Tom, as Gittings explains, knew about another fund their grandmother had set up for them in Chancery, which for some unaccountable reason neither the family lawyer nor Abbey had advised them of.) George's plans were a further anxiety for Keats. Towards the end of February Keats found that he was expected to relieve George in looking after his brother Tom, and he left London in early March. He dashed down a hasty preface for *Endymion* which his publishers sensibly rejected on the grounds that its self-deprecating tone was likely to put off the reader and that several of the phrases would annoy the reviewers.

It was necessary for him to write and send a second, slimmer one, which he did by 10th April. He was writing 'Isabella, or the Pot of Basil', a versification of one of Boccaccio's stories, and that too was finished by the end of April, at about the time *Endymion* was published.

It was during this stay that he was writing some of his most profound letters like the superb literary-psychological one to Reynolds on 3rd May. He left Teignmouth with Tom early in May and was back in London on 11th May, having found Devonshire mixed in its pleasures: 'The Climate here weighs us (down) completely—Tom is quite low spirited—It is impossible to live in a country which is continually under hatches.' On 29th May George married Georgiana Wylie, a girl John found himself much taken with. Keats was now thinking of his next major composition, *Hyperion*, which he first mentioned to Haydon at the end of January: 'In *Endymion* I think you may have many bits of the deep and sentimental cast—the nature of *Hyperion* will lead me to treat it in a more naked and grecian Manner—and the march of passion and endeavour will be undeviating'.

Study and travel were prominent items in Keats's schedule of improvement. 'I purpose within a Month to put my knapsack at my back and make a pedestrian tour through the North of England, and part of Scotland—to make a sort of Prologue to the Life I intend to pursue—that is, to write, to study and to see all Europe at the lowest expense'. Tom's illness and the problems of seeing *Endymion* into print made him uncertain about this trip and he changed his mind more than once. But he was encouraged to go by the sensitive, self-sacrificing Tom, and having managed to extract five hundred pounds from Abbey, the last substantial amount he got from him, he left for the North in company with Brown, travelling to Liverpool with George and Georgiana who were to sail from there to Philadelphia. He saw George only once again and Georgiana never. George himself died a prosperous man, of tuberculosis, at the age of 55 (in Louisville, Kentucky).

Brown was a tough, energetic, loyal, amiable man, with a business background and artistic tastes. He was one of the most faithful if not most sensitive of Keats's friends. He and Keats made their difficult way to Ambleside to find that Wordsworth, who had earlier left London in a huff according to Keats, was canvassing for the local Tory candidate, Parliament having been dissolved on 10th June ('sad—sad—sad,' said Keats). Keats was entranced with the mountain scenery. 'I live in the eye: and my imagination, surpassed, is at rest.'

Of the three matters agitating Keats at this period, his art, his relations with women, health—Tom's and his own—health was to provide a menacing context for all his creative

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work and personal life from now on. The response to his work by the reviewers, after the immediate upset, he took with admirable detachment. His inner sense, deriving from a profound artistic integrity, as to what was good, or weak, in his own work, meant far more to him than the reaction of the mediocre or the merely fashionable. The last of these matters was his relationships with women which proved to be awkward and troublesome for all his life. Keats was deeply attached to his mother whom he guarded during his school days with ferocious intensity in her last illness. Her curious and hasty second marriage distressed him and her death that shattered the family circle scarred him permanently. He wanted to be close to his sister but this become more and more impossible because of the jealous guardianship of Abbey which, Bate shrewdly guesses, was as much motivated by the desire to keep Keats in ignorance about the family inheritance as by moral doubts about the quality of Keats's friends. His very attachment to his brothers, the product of his early life, itself worked against easy, natural relations with women. 'I have two Brothers,' he wrote to Bailey, 'one is driven by the "burden of Society" to Amercia the other with an exquisite love of Life, is in a lingering state—My Love for my Brothers from the early loss of our parents and even for earlier Misfortunes has grown into a affection "passing the Love of Women"—I have been ill temper'd with them, I have vex'd them—but the thought of them has always stifled the impression that any woman might otherwise have made upon me.' (Nor, I suppose, should we forget that Keats, though perfectly formed and strikingly handsome, was barely more than five feet tall, and by no means insensitive to his lack of height.)

Towards the end of October, he met again Mrs Isabella Jones. He had some modestly romantic encounter, nothing more, with her about a year before when he met her at Hastings either in the late May or early June. She was a handsome, independent and impressive woman. 'The Eve of St Agnes' was written on her suggestion, as was probably 'The Eve of St Mark'.

She insisted that her relationship with Keats be kept a secret from their friends, and Keats appears to have obeyed this injunction. Isabella Jones was connected with a prominent Irish Whig family and either the close friend or more probably, surely, the mistress of one of them, Donal O'Callaghan. In his *John Keats: The Living Year,* Gittings prints a letter from her to John Taylor in which she speaks of Severn's description of Keats's death. It is an impatient and vivacious document, touched with an Augustan distaste for sentimentality when it refers to Severn's account of Keats's death.

The second woman who affected Keats at this time was Jane Cox, a smoulderingly beautiful, intelligent girl. 'She is not Cleopatra;' Keats wrote, 'but she is at least a Charmian. She has a rich eastern look; she has fine eyes and fine manners. When she comes into a room she makes an impression the same as the Beauty of a Leopardess.' He wasn't in love with her, he told George, but 'she kept me awake one Night as a tune of Mozart's might do'. If he wasn't in love with her, he was certainly in a state to be in love. In fact he was in love very soon after meeting Fanny Brawne, which he did in November of this year. Tom was sinking, and Keats was composing *Hyperion.* The pull of death against the attraction of life was a deep, constitutive tension in Keats's experience and his art. *Hyperion,* while it did not itself attain it, except in patches, helped towards the living equilibrium of the two he achieved finally in the great Odes. He did not succeed in arriving at anything as satisfying in his personal life. Nor had Fanny either the resources of character or feeling to help him to do so: something for which as an inexperienced girl of eighteen she can hardly be blamed. The Brawnes—or at least the husband Samuel, the mother had grander connections—came from a lower-middle-class background not unlike Keats's own. Samuel Brawne had even kept an inn at one time. When he died—again it was from tuberculosis—he left a widow and three children, Fanny who was now eighteen, Samuel fourteen, Margaret nine, and very little else. Mrs Brawne's income came from a deceased brother. Brown had let Mrs Brawne his Wentworth Place house when he went with Keats to Scotland. On his return the Brawnes took lodgings nearby at Downshire Hill, and when in the spring of 1819 the Dilkes moved to Westminster, the Brawnes rented Dilke's house. When Tom—poor Tom—died on 1st December 1819 Keats moved next door to them as a paying guest with Brown. Nothing would be more natural than that the acquaintance should rapidly ripen into love. Fanny, although she had a touch of the positive and independent quality of Isabella Jones and Jane Cox, was quite unlike them. Immature where they were poised, pretty where they were beautiful, she had few intellectual tastes and little interest in poetry. She was by no means unintelligent and developed in her maturity, when she lived in Europe with her husband Louis Lindo, a gift for languages and a shrewd financial sense. At this time, she preferred chat and clothes to poetry and philosophy.

Fanny's first impressions of John are cooler but less observant than his. She remembered years later that 'his conversation was in the highest degree interesting, and his spirits good, excepting at moments when anxiety regarding his brother's health dejected them'. They do, however, convey a sense of the reserved courage with which Keats bore himself in his anguish at Tom's plight. Keats's own reaction is sharper, and it includes the note of irritated fascination their relationship was never really to be free of.

The next three months of Keats's life were at once a jumble of distractions and a period of extraordinary interior transformation. The shattering blow of Tom's death, no easier for being expected, was followed by the harassing business of settling Tom's estate.

Keats's throat trouble, which seems to have been becoming chronic, still bothered him. *Hyperion* was hanging fire, and his second volume had evoked as poor a response from the reading public as the first. It even flashed through his mind to take up medicine again. His friends had entertained him almost frantically after Tom's death but he resolved to give up 'traipsing' and concentrate on his own work. Haydon, as usual hard up, was pressing him for money. The suspicious and curmudgeonly Abbey opposed Keats's desire to be closer to his sister Fanny. He visited Covent Garden with Rice and Reynolds, and the British Museum with Severn. He had reached an understanding with Fanny Brawne on Christmas Day and he followed this with a visit to Chichester to Dilke's parents where he stayed with Brown and wrote 'The Eve of St Agnes'.

In February he began 'The Eve of St Mark' but never finished it. He continued with his reading which now included Voltaire and American history. Anxious for exercise he played cricket on 18th March, was hit by a ball and got his second black eye since leaving school, and was given a little opium to relieve it. During March and the first fortnight of April he complained constantly of his 'indolence' as he called it. 'I have written nothing, and almost read nothing—but I must turn over a new leaf', he wrote to his sister Fanny on 12th April.

This sad, busy, frustrating part of his life ended suddenly. He gave up *Hyperion* and in a single day, 21st April, he wrote 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'. This exquisitely poised and delicately individual poem, the begetter and the unattainable ideal of so much pre-Raphaelite art, is a marvellous illustration of the truly creative mind. It is thronged with literary echoes, resonances and sources, and in one sense it could hardly be less original if it had set out to collect and incorporate 'influences'. In the immediate background are Wordsworth, Coleridge and Cary's translation of Dante, then Scott and Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry,* and further back William Brown, Robert Burton, Spenser and the medieval French poet Alain Chartier. And yet it transcends all that it came from and is uniquely Keats's own, both in substance and voice. The rhythm with its minimum of

conditions is mobile and unclogged, and the usual simple ballad line, the alternation of four and three beats, disposed into two phrasal units, is given Keat's own modification into a fourth line of a double and strongly stressed beat. It is a rhythm which is spare enough in action and never far enough from the movement of speech, into which it can fall with perfect naturalness. As to what the poem means, it seems to be wholly wrong to attempt, as some do, to offer a prose paraphrase of some extractable significance. Its meaning cannot be equated with the sterility of lust, with a siren principle of female destructiveness, or even taken to be an analogue of Keats's relationship with Fanny Brawne. No doubt each of these notions is either faintly or more positively present here or there in the poem. But while its meaning cannot be wholly bleached of thought, of theory, it cannot be phrased in terms or thought in any way consonant with its complexity. Its meaning is really an attitude, a profound intuition about life, which shapes and turns and colours the images, the rhythm and the tone. At the heart of that attitude is a sense of the one unavoidable condition of existence, the inescapable, terrifying and hopeless grimness of reality. The pressure and the force of this conviction are all the more positive in a context of wonder and faery where it might have been thought not possible to admit it all:

Oh what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

Oh what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done...

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild...

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried—'La Belle Dame sans Merci
Thee hath in thrall!'

I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke and found me here,
On a cold hill's side.

And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

Part II

Keats's poetic career was an extraordinary passage from Cockney to classic. Between the *Eve of St Agnes* and the great Odes Keats was astonishingly transformed, from a charming minor talent to a genius of the first order. As I see it this development is a brilliant, profound and exemplary exercise in the education of sensibility. By sensibility I mean the whole concourse of mental powers in co-operative action, feeling which energises reason and reason which enlightens feeling; or what Remy de Gourmont described as that power of feeling which is unequally developed in each human being and which includes reason itself, since sensibility is nothing other than reason crystallised. We see the education of sensibility, in the concrete, stage by stage, in Keats's poetry. But Keats, we now acknowledge, was a man with an unusual capacity for acute analysis; and in his letters he offers a lucid and persuasive account (even if a scattered and unsystematic one) of the development of his sensibility. And it is this—Keats's own view of what takes place as the poet's powers unfold, his own interpretation of what he called the 'allegory' of his life, that I want to talk about here.

First then, there is the primary poetic sensibility corresponding to the ordinary man's endowment. Keats calls this 'primitive sense'—the knowledge of contrast, feeling for light and shade, all that information necessary for a poem'. There is no doubt that there is delight to be had, by poet and reader, in the uninhibited play of this primitive sense. But it is like the graceful, fluent discipline of childhood, supple but not subtle, free but not disciplined, exquisite but not serious. No young poet, any more than any young person, becomes adult by the mere progression of original endowment. It also requires effort, conscience, thought. The man at a certain point in his life, the poet at a certain point in his career—maybe earlier, maybe later—has to make a fundamental choice. For Keats this choice assumed a variety of forms: 'I think a little change has taken place in my intellect lately—I cannot bear to be uninterested or unemployed, I, who for so long a time have been addicted to passiveness', or again, 'I hope I am a little more of a Philosopher than I was, consequently a little less of versifying Pet-lamb'. Perhaps these words put the choice most nakedly: 'I must choose between despair and Energy—I choose the latter'.

For everyone who wishes to discipline his sensibility—'to refine one's sensual vision into a sort of North Star' as Keats put it—this choice lies at the roots of progress. It cannot be evaded. By it a man decides against the volatility of impulse and for the life of reason, which is as Santayana said 'simply the unity given to all existence by a mind in love with the good'. To say that the life of reason belongs to a mind in love with the good is to indicate the two streams of personal development. They are moral and intellectual. Sensibility itself is matured not by efforts aimed directly at sensibility, but by becoming more piercingly informed by intelligence and less precariously an instrument of morality. This is not to say that intellectual and moral development are parallel but independent. It is rather that morality becomes intellectually enlightened and intelligence dignified by a deeply felt morality. Keats makes this connection himself. In sentences which follow one another, he says: 'I find that I can have no enjoyment in the World but continual drinking of Knowledge—I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good for the world'. Sensibility, the intellect, the moral sense develop as a single existence, flow into and out of one another, till they are indistinguishable. Or in Keats's idiom: 'then I should be most enviable—with the yearning Passion I have for the beautiful, connected and made one with the ambition of my intellect'.

To Keats the matured or maturing sensibility shows itself as having or coming to have a certain complex of habits and qualities, moral and intellectual. The first is that consistent moral attitude which we can call integrity. This is the recognition and acceptance of an order which must never be compromised by mere expediency, or disturbed by personal caprice, or sacrificed to any interest outside itself. It is the moral correlative of the coherence of reason itself and the primary virtue of the mind. As Keats said: 'for that sort of probity and disinterestedness which such men as Bailey possess, does hold and grasp the tip-top of any spiritual honors that can be paid to anything in this world'. Keats was aware of the danger of making integrity itself an abstraction, of making a holocaust of one's humanity before it. But perhaps to be aware of this danger is to anticipate it. 'All I hope', he says, 'is that I may not lose all interest in human affairs—that the solitary indifferences I feel for applause even from the finest Spirits will not blunt any acuteness of vision I may have.'

And the second great intellectual virtue is a tonic sense of reality, a keen sense of fact. It is both generous and disillusioned, tolerant and discriminating. We find the two themes in perfect equilibrium in the following comment: 'Men should bear with each other: there lives not the Man who may not be cut up, aye hashed to pieces on his weakest side. The best of Men have but a portion of good in them, a kind of spiritual yeast in their frames which creates the

ferment of existence, by which a Man is propell'd to act and strive and buffet with Circumstance.' Again in this passage we hear a cool dismissal of the pretensions of men. 'Very few men have ever arrived at a complete disinterestedness of Mind: very few have been influenced by a pure desire of the benefit of others—in the greater part of the Benefactors to Humanity some meretricious motive has sullied their greatness,—some melodramatic scenery has fascinated them.' But Keats's realistic recognition of the impurity of human motives never descends into superficial cynicism. He goes on: 'as Wordsworth says, "we have all one human heart"—there is an electric fire in human nature tending to purify—so that among these human creatures there is continually some birth of new heroism'.

Keats's diagnosis of human fact, his estimation of human possibility, goes with an account, equally acute, equally liberal, of the specifically intellectual advance of the disinterested and undistracted mind. The following words, for example, are not a defence of universal scepticism—Keats was constantly making up his mind—but a vivid plea for range and catholicity, for intellectual sympathy and suspended judgement. 'The only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing—to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts, not a select party... All the stubborn arguers you meet with are of the same brood. They never begin upon a subject they have not preresolved on.' 'An extensive knowledge is needful to thinking people', but in Keats's view it was to be valued because 'it takes away the heat and fever: and helps, by widening speculation, to ease the Burden of the Mystery'. An extensive knowledge is also a demonstration in one mind of the unity of all knowledge, and to be aware of this, thinks Keats, is both a stage in, and a sign of, intellectual maturity. 'When the Mind is in its infancy a Bias is in reality a Bias, but when we have acquired more strength, a Bias becomes no Bias. Every department of Knowledge we see excellent and calculated towards a great whole.'

But the knowledge which exists in any mind is never a mere aggregation of components. It makes a structure even if it is only a fragmentary one. It is also true, as Keats realised, that no matter how extensive the knowledge and how exceptional the mind, its knowledge is organised under only one or two fundamental themes or interests: 'the two uppermost thoughts in a Man's mind are the two poles of his World, he revolves on them and every thing is southward or northward to him through their means. We take but three steps from feathers to iron'. Accepting this limitation checks fanaticism. 'The points of leaves and twigs on which the spider begins her work are few, and she fills the air with a beautiful circuiting. Man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Web of his Soul.' Nor is this fact about the human mind anything which should lead to division either of man from man or of specialist from the general body of the educated. 'But the Minds of Mortals are so different and bent on such diverse journeys that it may at first appear impossible for any common taste and fellowship to exist between two or three under these suppositions. It is, however, quite the contrary. Minds would leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in numberless points, and at last greet each other at the journey's end.' Moreover, 'every point of thought', Keats insisted, 'is the centre of an intellectual world', and 'when Man has arrived at a certain ripeness in intellect any one grand and spiritual passage serves him as a starting-post towards all "the two and thirty Palaces" '.

Keats, in describing his own maturing sensibility, again and again stresses the need for activity, for effort and energy. He goes as far as to say, 'every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer'. His insistence is related to what he feels to be the importance of the truth he is recommending, but it is also in part explained by the conformation of his own character which was unduly susceptible to the attractions of luxurious indolence. But we should not be having Keats's full view if we failed to consider his insight into the other side of the question, namely, the importance in intellectual development of not forcing the issue, of patience. Keats believed too that nothing is 'finer for the purposes of great productions than a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers': and although this may seem odd to us as we observe his own extraordinary quick transformation, no doubt to him, a genius, it felt like a slow and painful process. As well as the ardour of energy then, a man needed to be patient and receptive: not to be 'buzzing here and there for a knowledge of what is to be arrived at'. There should be no 'irritable reaching after fact and reason'. The ability to wait calmly on the gradual ripening of the powers of the mind is the intellectual equivalent of an attribute we find frequently referred to in Keats's letters as proper to a mature mind. And that is a rational humility. I say rational because there is nothing servile or unmanly in Keats's idea of humility. 'I have not', he writes, 'the slightest feel of humility towards the Public, or to anything in existence but the Eternal Being, the Principle of Beauty, and the Memory of great Men'. But if he stood in a position of dignified independence towards his audience, his attitude to it was also free from any infection of arrogance. 'I have not the least contempt for my species, and though it may sound paradoxical, my greatest elevations of Soul leave me every time more humbled.' To be humble towards those with a more inclusive view of life and a finer vision of perfection, Keats thought, was to preserve the health of one's soul with the salt of sanity. 'There is no greater Sin, after the seven deadly, than to flatter oneself into an idea of being a great Poet, or one of those beings who are privileged to wear out their Lives in the pursuit of Honor.' To be humble is to have a clear view of reality; to be arrogant is to fall into the illusory and the unreal. 'Every man has his speculations, but every man does not brood and peacock over them till he makes a false coinage and deceives himself.'

Humility was part of the standard Keats used to make a fundamental division of minds. He distinguished the immature from the disciplined in these words: 'There are two distinct tempers of mind in which we judge of things—the worldy, theatrical and pantomimical; and the unearthly, spiritual and ethereal. In the former, Buonaparte, Lord Byron, and this Charmian hold the first place in our Minds; in the latter, John Howard, Bishop Hooker rocking his child's cradle, and you, my dear Sister, are the conquering feelings.' What the other part of his standard was may best be conveyed by a phrase he used of Dilke, 'a Godwin-perfectibility Man'. Keats himself was not, nor was anyone he approved of, a 'Godwin-perfectibility' man. In spite of his belief that there had been between Milton and Wordsworth 'a grand march of intellect' he did not interpret the experience of history nor his own life as a necessary, upward drive to the millennium. His sight was free from the myopia of unqualified optimism. Keats was not convinced that even the most liberal intentions, the most candid co-operation, the best of good will could usher in an earthly paradise or make human experience just a comfortable context for man to develop in. He held, that is, the tragic view of life. And he believed that this view distinguished the mature from the undisciplined, the developed from the arrested mind. The tragic view of man modified his attitude to the practical affair of daily life ('Circumstances are like Clouds continually gathering and bursting—while we are laughing the seed of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events') just as it provided the organising principle of his parable of the human situation, 'the large mansion of many apartments'.

These then, in Keat's reading of his own life are the stages in the education of the sensibility; first, a fundamental decision on the side of seriousness and maturity; next the long effort 'to refine one's sensual vision' by acquiring the virtues of the disciplined mind, integrity, generosity, disinterestedness, a clear eye for reality, a scope of reference, a sense of the limitation and the structure of one's knowledge, energy in

effort and patience in waiting, and a calm and balanced humility; then the recognition and acceptance of a mature conception of man. And in what does all this result? In Keats's eyes the education of sensibility, the qualities engendered in the course of it, the interplay of various elements of human nature, even the circumstances of our life—all these are preparatory and subordinate not only to a fuller discovery of the self but to its actual constitution. Every human life must be spent in the struggle to establish what Keats calls a 'sense of identity'. The education of sensibility and the disciplining of intellect are only the most advanced, the least wasteful forms of a universal human effort, the effort to become a person, the effort of every character to become 'personally itself'. He thought of the world as a place in which we alter nature, where we construct from our experience and whatever lies to hand, a personal identity, in which we school an intelligence and make it a soul:

> I can scarcely express what I but dimly perceive—and yet I think I perceive it—that you may judge the more clearly I will put it in the most homely form possible—I will call the world a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read—I will call the human heart the horn Book used in that School—and I will call the Child able to read, the Soul made from that School and its hornbook. Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school and Intelligence and make it a Soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways! Not merely is the Heart a Hornbook, It is the Minds Bible, it is the Minds experience, it is the teat from which the Mind or intelligence sucks its identity.

Part III

Keats came from a lower-middle-class background which knew poverty although it was connected with means, and he lived in a literary and artistic setting. He derived from the former and kept up amid the latter modest Regency tastes for girls (though he was awkward in company), cards (which he could play all night on occasion), and claret, which he loved 'to a degree' and on which he could write more lyrically than any wine columnist: 'For really 't is so fine—it fills the mouth one's with a gushing freshness—then goes down cool and feverless—then you do not feel it quarrelling with your liver—no it is rather like a Peace maker and lies as quiet as it did in the grape'. He liked what one thinks as Regency food: 'I said this same Claret is the only palate-passion I have I forgot game I must plead guilty to the breast of a Partridge, the back of a hare, the backbone of a grouse, the wing and side of a Pheasant and a Woodcock *Passim*'. He was physically strong before his disease took hold of him, capable of walking many hard miles when on his travels in Scotland, or tramping, for example, in London from Westminster to Highgate as a fairly routine outing. The only symptom of weakness he showed was a chronic sore throat which is mentioned with sinister regularity. He did not regard himself as a sensual person in spite of his liking for claret and food and women's company. He was used to the privations, he maintained, and in the midst of the world lived like a hermit. His hermitical periods were punctured by some intense social activity, however. He was not ignorant of his reputation and of what would be required to improve it. He wrote on 17th September about his proposed tragedy for Kean, 'My name with the literary fashionables is vulgar—I am a weaver boy to them—a Tragedy would lift me out of this mess. And mess it is as far as it regards our Pockets'. He offers his brother advice, suggesting that he might learn from what he does when he is low:

> But be not cast down any more than I am. I feel I can bear real ills better than imaginary ones. Whenever I find myself growing vapourish, I rouse myself, wash and put on a clean shirt brush my hair and clothes, tie my shoestrings neatly and in fact adonize as I were going out—then all clean and comfortable I sit down to write.

And while he could be irritated by external things, for example, the postman Bentley's boys and their racket when he lodged with them, 'Their little voices are like wasps stings', his greatest irritation was caused by unmanly or undignified behaviour. He was disgusted with Dilke who was an anxious and officious parent, entirely swallowed up in his boy, suffering for his every bruise: 'The boy has nothing in his ears all day but himself . . . O what a farce is our greatest cares!'

The light-hearted, bantering, gossipy Keats to be observed throughout this correspondence, even in the concluding letter written to Georgiana alone between 13th and 28th January 1820 (her husband being absent from her, mending his financial fences in London), is, one cannot help noting, sometimes attended by another Keats. I do not mean the ecstatic, fainting aesthete, but an altogether grimmer presence, stricken not only with the tragic but the pointless in human life. It shows itself on the one hand in *accidie*, as when he writes to Georgiana meaning to comfort her in her isolation by referring to his own:

> 'T is best to remain aloof from people and like their good parts without being eternally troubled with the dull processes of their every day Lives. When once a person has smok'd the vapidness of the routine of Society he must have either self interest or the love of some sort of distinction to keep him in good humour with it. All I can say is that standing at Charing Cross and looking east west north and south I can see nothing but dullness.

Moreover, Keats's sense of the tedium of life was not alleviated by any religious consolation. Not that Keats was positively irreligious (he accepted, he said after Tom's death, some kind of immortality), although he was certainly anticlerical: 'I begin to hate Parsons—they did not make me love them that day—when I saw them in their proper colours—A Parson is a Lamb in a drawing room and a lion in a Vestry.'

This is among the last evidence of a happier, more generous Keats. In the remaining half dozen letters to Fanny, which go from May to August, the voice is shriller, the attitude more pinched and suspicious, the tone more angrily exigent and overbearing, the feelings distracted and even spiteful, his self-regard more and more concentrated, the wretchedness sourer, the misery deepening into dispair. He cannot bear to be out of her thoughts, or to think of her enjoying herself among others. 'I am greedy of you', he says. 'Do not think of any thing but me . . . Your going to town alone, when I heard of it was a shock to me . . . *Promise me you will not for some time, till I get better* . . . You must be mine to die upon the rack if I want you.' We feel increasingly a sense of uncontrolled and indignant diction, accompanied by a neurotic suspicion and sexual jealousy: 'I suspect a few people to hate me well enough, *for reasons I know of, who have pretended a great friendship for me*'. Even in the letters when his frenzy abates, it is rather from weariness than will, one judges. He lies with her ring on his finger and her flowers at his side, as he tells her in June; and he reports at the beginning of July that he is marking the most beautiful passages in Spenser to give her some small pleasure. As soon as his energy revives at all, as it did on 5th July when he went for a walk—July was a fine, sunny month—he begins to rage at Fanny again for her flirting with Brown, '. . . a good sort of Man—he did not know he was doing me to death by inches'. In fact, he is lacerated with anxiety about Fanny's virtue:

> Shakespeare always sums up matters in the most sovereign manner. Hamlet's heart was full of such Misery as mine is when he said to Ophelia 'Go to a Nunnery, go, go!' Indeed I should like to give up the matter at once—I should like to die. I am sickened at the brute world which you are smiling with. I hate men and women more.

The closing words are of waste and despair: '. . . everything else tastes like chaff in my Mouth'. 'The last two years taste like brass upon my Palate . . . the world is too brutal for me—I am glad there is such a thing as the grave.'

A month before this letter, written at the beginning of July, the third volume of poems, *Lamia, Illabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems*, had been published 'with low hopes' as far as Keats was concerned but, in the event, it received a distinctly more favourable response than his earlier work. It

was warmly reviewed by Charles Lamb in the *New Times* and by Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* in August. This was too late to qualify Keats's despair. It was clear to others as well as to himself that the grave was not far off. Certainly another English winter would kill him. He spent the last month in England at the Brawnes's house, nursed by Fanny's mother and by Fanny herself. Shelley, with characteristic but slightly grand generosity, had invited Keats to stay in Italy with himself and his family near Pisa, but Keats did not take up this well-meant offer. He mentioned once or twice in his letters, with the detached indifference of the invalid, that there was a plan for him to spend the winter in Italy. Taylor was approached and advanced the money. Joseph Severn rather than Brown, who was unavailable, undertook to accompany Keats, and Taylor booked a passage for Keats on the *Maria Crowther*, a small ship destined for Naples. He left the Brawnes to stay at Taylor's for a few days before joining the ship at Gravesend. They were unable to sail because of the weather until Monday 18th September. There was, by a perverse irony, a young woman on board, a Miss Cotterell, also in the final stages of consumption. She acted as a terrifying mirror to Keats's own state.

The voyage and the very bad conditions on board contributed, Gittings thinks, to shortening Keats's life. Even when the ship arrived in Naples it was put into quarantine because of a suspected outbreak of typhus in London, and the passengers not allowed onshore until 31st October. They travelled to Rome, Keats steadily growing worse. Taylor had arranged for Dr James Clarke to treat Keats in Rome, where they stayed at 26 Piazza di Spagna in a house much patronized by British visitors. Keats seemed to make a slight but, as it proved, false improvement. He was much worse towards the end of December, his blood spitting became worse,and his fever constant. Keats suffered, raved, wasted, despaired and was even denied the consolation as a trained physician of not knowing what was happening to him. He looked forward to death. He said to Dr Clarke, 'How long is this posthumous life of mine to last?' He used to hold in his hand an oval cornelian that Fanny Brawne had given him as a parting present. On 23rd February, Severn reported to Brown:

> ... the approaches of death came on. 'Severn—I—lift me up—I am dying—I shall die easy—don't be frightened—be firm, and thank God it has come!' I lifted him up in my arms. The phlegm seemed boiling in his throat and increased until 11, when he gradually sunk into death—so quiet—that I still thought he slept.

For Keats began his poetic life with a corrupted sensibility. The career of most artists moves from simplicity to complexity, or from uncertainty to assurance, or from illusion to reality. The direction of Keats's progress, in ironic contrast with that of his body, was from sickness to health. We often think of corruption as a state supervening on a period of health, or of decadence as the aftermath of vigour; but for the artist himself it can be corruption which comes first and health which has to be agonisingly striven for.

Notes on books

Vascular Grafting edited by C B Wright. 397 pages, illustrated. Wright PSG, Bristol. £47.50.

This is subtitled 'Clinical Applications and Techniques'. Much of it is aimed at displaying the search for small synthetic vascular grafts. The first section deals with development research, followed by large then small vessel grafts. Subsequent chapters deal with clinical technique, complications, newer standards and concepts in grafting.

Clinical Orthopaedics edited by Nigel Harris. 1028 pages, illustrated. Wright PSG, Bristol. £80.

This new orthopaedic text is aimed at the surgeon in training, but will be valuable for the experienced surgeon. It emphasises the causes, pathology, clinical features, assessment and management but excludes detailed operative technique. The 51 contributors have assembled 32 chapters in 3 sections—paediatric orthopaedics, general orthopaedics and special topics. Extensive references are given at the end of each chapter.

Computed Tomography in Orthopaedic Radiology edited by Erik Boijsen and Leif Ekelund. 64 pages, illustrated. Georg Thieme, Stuttgart. DM 78.

The indications for, and interpretation of, computerised tomography in orthopaedics are reviewed by the editors, from Lund, Sweden, with the help of 7 contributors. It is valuable following trauma, spinal disease, paediatrics and oncology. The book is illustrated with scans to expand the text and traditional radiographs.

Atlas of Angioaccess Surgery by P A Rubio and E M Farrell. 260 pages, illustrated. Blackwell, Oxford. £83.60.

The authors from Houston describe arteriovenous shunts and fistulas, percutaneous catheters, and their complications. On one page is a clear line drawing with a short clear text on the facing page. All the references are given at the end of the book.

Meniscus Lesions by Peter Ricklin, Alois Rüttimann and Manfredi Suevo Del Buono. 140 pages. 2nd edition. Georg Thieme Verlag, Stuttgart. DM 90.

This is the revised English translation of the German edition. It deals systematically with the anatomy, physiology, pathology, diagnosis, assessment and treatment of meniscus lesions. The indications for surgery and techniques are carefully explained, followed by a review of the late results of meniscectomy.

Congenital Deformities of the Spine by R B Winter. 343 pages, illustrated. Georg Thieme Verlag, Stuttgart. DM 198.

Embryology, genetics, natural history and evaluation of spinal deformities are first dealt with. Subsequent chapters deal with non-operative and operative techniques, with complications and associated anomalies and syndromes. The book is illustrated with line drawings, photographs and radiographs.

Diagnosis of Breast Disease edited by C A Parsons. 283 pages, illustrated. Chapman and Hall, London. £26.00.

Contributors describe breast pathology and clinical features followed by reviews of the value of mammography, cytology, thermography and ultrasound in breast disease diagnosis. It brings together contributors from different disciplines to offer a balanced view.

Medical Care of the Surgical Patient by D R Goldmann, F H Brown, W K Levy, G B Slap and E J Sussman. 621 pages. Harper and Row, London. £35.

The subtitle is 'A problem-oriented approach to management'. The 38 chapters are written by physicians describing medical problems arising in surgical patients. It includes chapters on cardiovascular, respiratory and renal problems and problems related to medical treatment of various conditions. The final chapter considers surgery in elderly patients.

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